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Cultivating National Will

An Introduction
to National Will

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Air War College
Maxwell Paper No.5

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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Foreword

This compelling study by Lt Col Lawrence E. Key examines how national will plays a decisive role during any application of US military power and not just the employment of forces to fight America's wars. Because of the decisive role national will plays, leaders need to understand what it is and—beyond its definition—the ways in which they can articulate and cultivate it. To gain this understanding, leaders must look at various means by which the American public expresses its collective will; the most important means being public opinion. However, the author argues that only mature collective opinion can represent national will. This nation's leaders need to understand how this maturation process works; they also need to understand how the media report events because this reporting can have an impact on how opinion evolves. Finally, leaders need to understand how to cultivate public opinion, and this paper presents several guidelines to aid them in this endeavor. Colonel Key illustrates his thesis by discussing the failure of the national leadership during the Somalian military operation to fully understand the nature of national will and how it could have been cultivated. One can only hope that future leaders will have a better understanding of national will as a vital component of national power.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bruce Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

D. Bruce Smith
Major General, USAF
Commandant
Air War College

About the Author

Lt Col Lawrence E. Key earned his MS in meteorology from Pennsylvania State University, his MSA in management from Georgia College, and his commission in 1977 through Officer Training School at Lackland Air Force Base (AFB), Texas. The first operational assignment for this North Carolina native was in 1978 to Robins AFB, Georgia, where he served as duty forecaster and wing weather officer for the 19th Bombardment Wing (Strategic Air Command). In 1981 he transferred to Shaw AFB, South Carolina, where he served as 3d Weather Squadron forecasting services officer. He then served an Air Force Institute of Technology tour as a student at Pennsylvania State University between 1982 and 1984. Following this assignment, he served from 1984 to 1988 as senior research meteorologist at the Air Force Engineering and Services Center, Tyndall AFB, Florida. Lieutenant Colonel Key then served as commander, Detachment 7, 20th Weather Squadron, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, from 1988 to 1991. In addition to his duties as commander, he served as the staff weather officer to the US Army's 25th Infantry Division (Light). After attending Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) in-residence from 1991 to 1992, he served on the ACSC faculty from 1992 to 1994. His decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters and the Air Force Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster. Lieutenant Colonel Key is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1995.

Cultivating National Will

An Introduction to National Will

"You know you never defeated us on the battlefield," said the American colonel. The North Vietnamese colonel pondered this remark a moment. "That may be so," he replied, "but it is also irrelevant."

—Harry G. Summers
On Strategy

Harry Summers' account of this verbal exchange between two adversaries reveals the essence of the relationship between American *national will* and the use of military force during the Vietnam War. Although possessing superior military strength, the people of the United States did not possess the collective will to prosecute the war indefinitely. As a result, a militarily inferior force achieved its objective of unifying the two Vietnams.

The relationship between American national will and the use of military force has its roots in the founding of the nation. Dating back to *The Federalist Papers*, the Founding Fathers wanted to ensure the people's control of the military and to guarantee that the United States would not go to war without the support of the American people.¹ As Gen Fred C. Weyand points out,

The American Army really is a people's Army in the sense that it belongs to the American people who take a jealous and proprietary interest in its involvement. When the Army is committed the American people are committed, when the American people lose their commitment it is futile to try to keep the Army committed. In the final analysis, the American Army is not so much an arm of the Executive Branch as it is an arm of the American people. The Army, therefore, cannot be committed lightly.²

General Weyand's statement implies that American national will plays a decisive role during *any* application of US military power, not just the employment of forces in fighting America's wars. This decisive role means that US leaders, including senior military leaders, must understand the nature of national will when they contemplate the employment of American military power. This understanding is especially important not only because the American people have an aversion to placing troops in harm's way unless the national interests are directly threatened, but also because declining defense budgets in

the post-cold-war era will make our national leaders think hard about committing troops to costly deployments. They cannot afford to deploy troops unless the national will supporting that deployment is present. In addition, national leaders must understand that the national will is not just part of the backdrop against which force employment decisions are made; these leaders can actually cultivate the national will to support a decision to deploy US forces into potentially hazardous situations. To *cultivate* the national will does not mean to lie to the American people to gain support for an ill-considered decision to deploy troops; it does mean to articulate for the American people the rationale for their use (i.e., the national interests at stake), the objectives they hope to accomplish, and an estimate as to how long the troops will be employed. In essence, cultivating national will simply means that the national leadership explains to the American people why they would like to *borrow* (to use General Weyand's metaphor) US military forces and when they expect to return those forces to their rightful owners.

This paper addresses the need to understand the nature of national will by first defining what is meant by national will. It then discusses how the nation articulates its collective will, emphasizing the nature of *public opinion* as an articulation of this collective will. A discussion of the importance of cultivating the national will follows, including guidelines on how to do this. The paper then concludes with a look at the role of national will played in the Somali military operation, arguing that American leadership did a poor job of cultivating the national will in support of that operation. It also argues that, despite this failure, the American national will did not necessarily falter on the issue of US military involvement in Somalia; rather, the national leadership *perceived* that the national will evaporated. It was that perception that prompted them to reduce the US presence there.

Definitions

A traditional view of international politics holds that national will is "the degree of determination with which a

nation supports the foreign policies of its government in peace or war."³ Put another way, national will is the "popular dedication to the nation and support for its policies, even when that support requires sacrifice."⁴ These views of national will imply that it serves as an intangible, but extremely important factor without which the nation's government cannot pursue its policies fully (if it can pursue them at all).⁵ Though not constant, this intangible factor can vary within the population, and it can vary overtime.

The strength of the nation's will can vary among various segments of the population. For example, any segment of the population which believes itself deprived of its rights or whose aspirations do not match the policies pursued by the majority of Americans will tend to be less patriotic than those who do not feel this way; therefore, their willingness to support the nation's policies will likely be weaker than that of the rest of the nation. Whenever dissensions divide people of a nation, popular support for a foreign policy will be tenuous at best, especially if the success or failure of the foreign policy bears directly on the nation's internal conflict.⁶

The strength of the national will can also vary in time. As Hans J. Morgenthau states, "A nation's will tends to manifest itself most clearly in times of national crisis, when the existence of the nation is at stake or an issue of fundamental importance must be decided."⁷ Measuring the strength of national will even during a crisis, is difficult, but there are clearly conditions under which national will could persevere, while in other situations that could diminish. For example, a people can be brought close to the breaking point by tremendous and useless losses in war, such as the French after the Nivelle offensive of 1917. A great military defeat also can undermine the national will, such as the Italian defeat in 1917 at Caporetto. The national will can also break under the impact of a combination of tremendous war losses in men and territory and governmental mismanagement, such as in Russia in 1917. Finally, perhaps as with the Romans, national will can slowly decline and "corrode at the edges—not break at all in one sudden collapse, even when exposed to a rare com-

bination of governmental mismanagement, devastation, invasion, and a hopeless war situation."⁸

In general, though, the more the nation's people identify with the actions and objectives of their government, the more likely it is for national will to be strong. One indication of a strong national will is "a patriotic feeling within the nation's people that can be rallied when the nation is attacked or insulted, even when the nation's government may not be particularly popular."⁹ An obvious example of this is the US reaction to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. A second indicator is "a belief that the government places the nation's welfare first and pursues policies compatible with the nation's historic role."¹⁰ However, to fully understand this relationship between the nation's *current* welfare and the nation's *historic* role, we must dig a little deeper and examine what constitutes the *nation*.

A nation does not exist as a monolithic entity; it exists as a collection of individuals. To constitute a nation, though, this collection of individuals must be tied together by an idea. This unifying "idea" is reflected in the concept of "national character." As Samuel Taylor Coleridge puts it,

There is an invisible spirit that breathes through a whole people, and is participated by all, though not by all alike; a spirit which gives a color and character both to their virtues and vices, so that the same action, such I mean as are expressed by the same words, are yet not the same in a Spaniard as they would be in a Frenchman.¹¹

In the case of the United States, this unifying idea or theme has been expressed in many ways. Henry A. Kissinger expressed it with these words,

Though other republics have existed, none had been consciously created to vindicate the idea of liberty. No other country's population had chosen to head for a new continent and tame its wilderness in the name of freedom and prosperity for all. Thus the two approaches, the isolationist and the missionary, so contradictory on the surface, reflected a common underlying faith: that the United States possessed the world's best system of government, and that the rest of mankind could attain peace and prosperity by abandoning traditional diplomacy and adopting America's reverence for international law and democracy.¹²

It follows, then, that to understand the concept of national will one must first understand the ideas that tend to

unify the people of the nation, and second, one must understand what is meant by the people who are unified to make up the nation. When Walter Lippmann examined the concept of *the people*, he argues that the term the people can have different meanings: one can speak of the people, as voters expressing their will through the ballot box, or one can speak of the people as "a community of the entire living population, with their predecessors and successors."¹³

In Lippmann's view, the people as voters cannot truly represent the people as the past, present, and future population of the nation. The primary reason for this is that the voters have never been and can never be more than a fraction of the total population. For example, voters constituted less than 5 percent of the American population when the Constitution was ratified.¹⁴ Further, the sum of the interests of all the members (not just voters) who comprise the nation cannot represent the interests, desires, and will of the people (hereafter referred to in this paper as the true nation, according to Lippmann, because "the several members who compose" the community are never identically the same members from one hour to another.

If a community were what they say, then in theory it should be possible to make a directory of its members, each with his address. But no such list could ever be compiled. While it was being compiled, new members would be being born and old members would be dying.¹⁵

The true nation, then, is not only the aggregate of living persons. The true nation is also the stream of individuals, the connected generations of changing persons, that Edmund Burke was talking about when he invoked the partnership "not only between those who are living" but also with "those who are dead, and those who are to be born." The true nation is a corporation, an entity which lives on while individuals come into it and go out of it.¹⁶

Put another way, besides the happiness and the security of the individuals currently belonging to the nation, there are also the happiness and the security of the individuals of whom generation after generation the nation will be comprised. If we think of it in terms of individual persons, the corporate body of the true nation is for the most part invisible because so many of the individuals which com-

prise it are dead or not yet born. Yet, in Burke's words, this intangible corporate being binds a man to his country with "ties which though light as air, are as strong as links of iron."¹⁷

The problem facing national leaders trying to gauge the national will is how to translate this intangible, though important, concept into something on which they can base policy. This problem, as implied above, results from the fact that the true nation as a corporate body is the true owner of the sovereign power, and, thus, the national will. However, the people, as an aggregate of persons having diverse, conflicting self-centered interests and opinions, are the only individuals available to represent the true nation. The question for the national leadership is whether there is some means by which the needs, desires, attitudes, and will of the individuals comprising the people can be translated to represent the will of the true nation. Answering this question requires an examination of how the people articulate their collective will.

Modes of Articulation

The American national will can be expressed or articulated to their leaders several ways. But the best way is to lump these means into two broad groups: formal and informal. Formal means of articulating national will include those that are prescribed by the Constitution or by law, while informal means comprise all other methods of articulating the national will. Examples of these methods are discussed below; the list is not exhaustive by any means, but it does point out ways by which the will of the American people reaches those in a position of responsibility.

The most formal method of expressing the public's collective will is by polling public opinion at the ballot box, for, in a democratic republic such as the US, the desires of the citizens (at least those who vote) are most explicitly made known on election day. A second formal means is through the judicial system. This involves court decisions that, in theory, mirror the decisions that society in its entirety would probably have reached if it had been given the opportunity. A third formal means of articulating the national will is by allocating the nation's resources among various

groups and organizations. The federal budget process is a formal means in that the law prescribes the procedures to be followed, although informal pressures and influences obviously play a role.

In addition to these formal methods, there are also numerous informal means by which the collective will of the people is made known. One of these means is through communication with elected decision makers or other influential individuals. Included in this category are letters to congressmen, letters to the editor of the local newspaper, and even "auditoriums" with on-line computer services in which subscribers can chat with each other about various issues or express their opinions to various organizations. Another such means of articulating a collective will occurs when parents allow their children to enlist in the armed forces. One effective way to observe this is simply by talking to those officers responsible for basic training. Yet another similar means of informally articulating the collective will is by the spontaneous reaction of an influential group to an activity they feel is not in the best interests of their community, such as the reaction of moderate southerners to the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Another informal means a group can use to articulate their collective will is by voting with their feet. The exodus of South Vietnamese from their homeland in the aftermath of the takeover by the North was partly an expression of their will not to live in a brutally repressive society.

The most important informal means of articulating a collective will is by public opinion. This means is important because, rightly or wrongly, national leaders pay attention to it. It is important because modern polling techniques track the public's opinion on almost any issue almost instantaneously. It is also important because changes in opinion from one issue to the next can be followed. Further, public opinion poll results do not suffer from some of the drawbacks inherent with the other means of articulating the national will.

Among the drawbacks of other means of articulating national will is that, while elections are the most direct means of indicating the national will, they occur too infrequently to consistently assist national leaders in gauging

the will of the people. In fact, many eligible voters choose not to participate in the electoral process. Using the legal system to get a sense of the national will is also less than ideal because it is too episodic and too dependent on the specifics of the legal question involved during any one proceeding. The budgeting process is useful, but it also suffers from a lack of timeliness; an event of concern to national leaders because of its dependence on the national will may not coincide with milestones in the budget debate. While useful when viewed in retrospect by decision makers, these means of articulating national will may not provide useful or timely information. This leaves public opinion as the only viable, routinely available indicator of national will.

One must resolve a fundamental issue, however, before attempting to use public opinion as an indicator of national will. That issue is whether there is a link between national will, as defined earlier, and the results of public opinion polls. Put another way, are public opinion polls a means by which the needs, desires, attitudes, and will of the individuals comprising the people can represent the people? The traditional view of international politics, as implied earlier, agrees that this cannot be the case.

As discussed earlier, the traditional view of international politics holds that the public does not have the ability to contribute to democratic policy-making. For example, Rousseau maintained that the public really is not interested in the affairs of state because they are occupied with their own problems; therefore, by implication, the public is not really interested, much less capable, of articulating the true national will.

What matters principally to every citizen is the observance of the laws internally, the maintenance of private property, and the security of the individual. As long as all goes well with regard to these three points, let the government negotiate and make treaties with foreign powers.¹⁸

According to the traditional view, another reason for this inability to reflect the true national will and to play an important role in international affairs is that public opinion moves much more slowly than events themselves. Again, according to Lippmann,

The movement of opinion is slower than the movement of events. Because of that, the cycle of subjective sentiments on war and

peace is usually out of gear with the cycle of objective developments. Just because they are mass opinions there is an inertia in them. It takes much longer to change many minds than to change a few. It takes time to inform and to persuade and to arouse large scattered varied multitudes of persons.¹⁹

Compounding the relatively slow movement of public opinion, according to Lippmann, is the fact that the public also lacks the knowledge needed to make the appropriate decisions that affect the national interest.

Strategic and diplomatic decisions call for a kind of knowledge—not to speak of an experience and a seasoned judgement—which cannot be had by glancing at newspapers, listening to snatches of radio comment, watching politicians perform on television, hearing occasional lectures, and reading a few books.²⁰

In sum, then, the traditional view of the link between public opinion and national will minimizes that link. In Lippmann's terminology, public opinion is not capable of representing the interests of the "invisible community," which it must do if it is to represent the national will.²¹

Recent research, however, counters this view. That is, the US public is actually rational and capable of contributing to the sensible conduct of foreign affairs, thus reflecting the national will in doing so.²²

The collective policy preferences of the American public are predominantly *rational*, in the sense that they are . . . generally stable, seldom changing by large amounts and rarely fluctuating back and forth; that they form *coherent* and mutually consistent (not self-contradictory) patterns, involving meaningful distinctions; that these patterns *make sense* in terms of underlying values and available information; that, when collective policy preferences change, they almost always do so in *understandable* and indeed, *predictable* ways, reacting in consistent fashion to international events and social and economic change as reported by the mass-media; and, finally, that opinion changes generally constitute *sensible* adjustments to the new conditions and new information that are communicated to the public.²³

Because the policy preferences of the American public "make sense in terms of underlying values and available information," public opinion, then, can be linked to national will.

There are several reasons these recent findings contradict the traditional view as espoused by Lippmann. One reason is that the traditional view tends to equate the public's collective opinion with that of its individual members. However, the research indicates that because collective

opinion represents a summation of individual views, it cancels out the distortions that appear when one focuses on individual opinions alone. "Not only are various individual irrationalities mutually offsetting through aggregation, but opinions examined over a sufficient span of time reveal a central tendency of popular preference, amid various inconsistencies that fluctuate randomly across time."²⁴

A second reason for the difference in views is that most public opinion polls that claim to gauge public awareness of various issues amount to little more than trivia quizzes. These polls fail to convey that "although Americans may not grasp much factual detail, they do understand the essentials of important matters, once the issues are fairly presented to them."²⁵ There is further evidence disputing the claim that the public is too ignorant to participate validly in the national security policy-making process. Many public opinion survey questions which suggest popular ignorance are misleading because they confuse the "active recall of factual information with a more latent recognition"; accordingly, actual knowledge levels are higher than indicated by quiz show questioning.²⁶

Another reason for this difference in views is the impact of improving levels of formal education on the ability of the public to discern the importance of foreign policy and to develop opinions concerning those policies. According to Miroslav Nincic,

The reasonableness, stability, and coherence exhibited by popular opinion are even more intimately connected to processes of *collective deliberation* within the United States—the complex system of organizations devoted to the collection and analysis of information, as well as the social networks involved in the diffusion of information. The result is an efficient division of labor in the processing of politically relevant information on matters they consider important. By this process of collective deliberation, the public has an aggregate reason about policy, and collective opinion becomes more than the sum of its individual parts.²⁷

More than the sum of its individual parts implies that collective opinion distilled through some form of collective deliberation can represent the national will as defined earlier.

Further support for collective public opinion as a rational expression of the public's desires and feelings on foreign affairs is that "the coherence, political relevance, and general sophistication of opinions is not entirely con-

tingent on the information on which it is based."²⁸ Put another way, not only is a huge amount of information nonessential to understanding foreign policy, but detailed information, in fact, may not always be desirable. A moderate level of policy-relevant information within the ranks of the public may better encourage consensus and compromise (and thus a convergence on a true national will) than one where detailed information is widely held.²⁹

Another reason for the difference in views is how messages from the media reach the public today. A traditional view of the formation of public opinion rests on the assumption that the transfer of information from the media to the public can be represented by a two-step model. According to this model, messages coming from the media do not generally reach the mass public directly, but via their effect on opinion leaders (e.g., teachers, community leaders, and ministers) who, then, directly convey the messages to those within the general public whom they are in a position to influence.³⁰ Recent research indicates this model no longer adequately describes the process. In Bruce Russett's view, messages emanate from the media are almost instantaneously transmitted to the public; in other words, opinion is diffused directly rather than via a two-step process.³¹ Once it reaches the public, opinion change is best described by analogy to "the epidemiological model, because change spreads to people in approximate order of their susceptibility to new information (depending on such circumstances as personality and ideological bent)."³² The two-step model is also weak because of the speed with which the media message is transmitted and because of the frequent direction in which opinion change works its way through society. These researchers find, in fact, that the more educated tend to be influenced by the less educated in terms of foreign policy decisions.³³

Given that the public, despite its improved level of education, is not a very keen observer of foreign affairs, an appropriate question to ask is, "On what does the public base its opinions?" According to Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, responses to foreign policy information depend, for any given member of the public, "on a relatively stable core of values and beliefs that constrain the manner

in which information is interpreted, and on the source of the information received and the manner in which it is presented.”³⁴ While there is still ample room for further investigation in this area, one clear message from the research is that individual self-interest plays only a relatively small role in responses to these polls and that even group identifications are generally less important than a person’s conception of the common good and the national interest.³⁵

The fact that collective public opinion on foreign affairs is based heavily on “a person’s conception of the common good and the national interest” implies that those opinions resulting from collective deliberation represent a reasonably accurate picture of the national will in a particular area of foreign policy. Given that the public is capable of representing and articulating the national will, it is imperative that the national leadership understand the importance of cultivating this will to support US foreign policy decisions if they want to achieve success.

Prerequisites for Cultivation

To effectively cultivate the American national will in support of a foreign policy decision, especially those involving the use of military forces, national leaders first must understand some basic concepts. One of these concepts is the nature of public opinion; that is, how does public opinion evolve on an issue? and At what point in its evolution can public opinion be considered to represent the national will? A second concept these leaders need to understand is how the media reports a story, especially a story like Somalia. Since public opinion can depend on how the information on which it is based is reported to the public, this understanding is important. A third concept relates to the way in which Americans typically react to foreign policy decisions. An understanding of this allows national leaders to better interpret the results of opinion polls and avoid reaching erroneous conclusions.

The Nature of Public Opinion

As argued earlier, collective public opinion can represent the national will. However, to fully understand how to cul-

tivate this will, national leaders need to look more closely at public opinion and clearly understand how it works. Daniel Yankelovich views public opinion on any issue as "less like a physical process than a biological one, evolving in seven stages." He states that it is wrong to assume that "public opinion is some kind of phenomenon like wind velocity, whose variations can be measured, and that the measurement is valid." In fact, polling results are usually misleading unless public opinion concerning that issue has had time to fully mature.³⁶

According to Yankelovich, public opinion on any issue develops slowly over a long period—at least 10 years for a complex issue. It evolves from "incoherent globs of opinion toward fully integrated, thoughtful, and considered public judgement." On issues in early stages of development, the quality of public opinion is raw and unformed; people express strong feelings, but this does not mean they have settled on their view of the issue. Their opinions are unstable and can vary at the slightest provocation. In the early stages, people have not thought through the consequences of their views, but when public opinion has progressed through all seven stages, it is solid and stable, not mushy. Yankelovich's views support the research cited earlier; that is, public opinion which has progressed through all seven stages of development best represents the national will.³⁷

Yankelovich labels Stage 1 in the development of public opinion as "Dawning Awareness." Here people become aware of an issue and start "the long and tortuous journey toward public judgment."³⁸ During Stage 2, "Greater Urgency," the public moves beyond awareness to a sense of urgency about an issue. But even at this stage, the public can be aware of a problem without feeling it is important or that anything needs to be done about it. In Stage 3, "Discovering the Choices," the public begins to focus on alternatives. Timing here varies depending on the issue. On some issues, according to Yankelovich, choices become clear almost immediately, but on most they do not. It takes years on some issues before feasible choices appear. During this stage, the public tends to focus on choices that leaders offer without insisting upon alternatives. Often these choices are not the best choices, and they are cer-

tainly not the only choices available. Yankelovich says, though, that Stage 3 represents progress "because it begins the process of converting the public's free-floating concern about the need to do something into proposals for action."³⁹

Evolution continues in Stage 4, "Wishful Thinking." Most of the time on most issues, the public raises a barricade of wishful thinking that they must overcome before it comes to grips with issues realistically. This wishful thinking can occur because people feel excluded from decisions on matters that affect their lives. Yet, people tend to act most responsibly when they are personally involved in the process. To make sacrifices willingly, people must understand why sacrifices are needed, and they must have some say in the sacrifices their leaders ask them to make. Even at this point, though, the bulk of the public has not focused on the hard choices.⁴⁰

The hard choices start in Stage 5, "Weighing the Choices." Here the public weighs the pros and cons of alternatives. Stages 4 and 5 actually overlap, with people thinking through how they feel at the same time that they continue to resist coming to grips with the hard choices. Wrestling with complex issues requires getting in touch with one's deepest values and often realizing that these values may conflict with one another on a particular question. People naturally resist having to compromise or abandon cherished values. Stage 5 embodies hard work, yet work that the public must do for itself—there are no shortcuts. In earlier stages the media and experts do most of the work. The media do well at consciousness raising, and leaders can formulate the policy choices, but, according to Yankelovich, the public must invest the time and effort to grasp the choices, understand their consequences, and wrestle with the conflicts of values these choices involve.⁴¹

The last two stages—Stage 6, "Taking a Stand Intellectually," and Stage 7, "Making a Responsible Judgement Morally and Emotionally"—are linked, but they differ in several respects. One way to look at these two stages is that people are quicker to accept change in their minds than in their hearts. Intellectual resolution requires people to reconcile inconsistencies, consider relevant facts and new re-

alities, and grasp the full consequences of choices. Emotional resolution requires people to confront their own ambivalent feelings, accommodate themselves to unwelcome realities, and overcome an urge to procrastinate. In arriving at moral resolution, the first impulse of people is to put their own needs and desires ahead of ethical commitments. But once they have time to reflect on their choices, especially if the larger society provides moral support, the ethical dimension asserts itself, and people struggle to do the right thing, often successfully. However, according to Yankelovich, inevitably resistance toward a policy choice grows as people learn more about the options and the extent to which each involves higher costs and less choice for the individual.⁴²

By the time public opinion has evolved to Stage 7, then, the public as a whole has gotten in touch with its basic values and wrestled intellectually, morally, and emotionally with the decision about the right thing to do. It is this contact with basic values that links fully evolved public opinion with national will. It is only when public opinion has evolved to Stage 7, then, that we can refer to public opinion as the national will. However, a full understanding of how this evolution takes place requires an understanding of how the public receives information on which it bases its opinions. More often than not, information on various issues reaches the public through the media, and national leaders need to understand how the media cover and report these issues.

Impact of the Media

As mentioned earlier, the media plays an important role as opinion develops through Yankelovich's Stages 1 through 4. Innumerable studies have shown how the media cover stories. One way to view the media's role in the evolution of public opinion, though, is to review the media coverage of Somalia; the reporting of this operation can serve as a template for how similar operations could be covered by the press.

Media coverage in Somalia followed a progression of five steps, and these steps can be applied to other potential contingency operations that may involve US forces or other

assets. There is no limit on how long these steps must take; they can occur gradually or quickly—sometimes even simultaneously. Reports of famine in Somalia in 1992 and in Ethiopia in 1984-85 completed the five-step cycle, but reports on other famines, such as those in the Sudan, never move beyond the first step or two. Generally, when press coverage of a particular famine reaches Step 3 or beyond, it typically has gathered enough momentum to resist facts that do not fit the popular story line.⁴³

During Step 1, "The Early Predictor Story," a news story about famine for example, usually appears as a wire service piece from Rome (headquarters of the United Nations [UN] World Food Program) or Geneva. Such stories warn of huge populations in danger of famine if something is not done, and say more donations are needed to avert disaster. Sometimes there are follow-ups to this story, but unless photographs of the famine appear the early predictor story remains just a small news item.⁴⁴

The second step occurs as the few relief organizations working in a region persuade some members of the news media—especially those who work in television—that the press is ignoring a famine story. A few news organizations show up—usually at the invitation and with the assistance of the relief organizations—and produce stories with pictures. These stories focus not just on the hunger but how it has been ignored. Having discovered the famine, the correspondents vigorously publicize it.⁴⁵

The third step develops as more news organizations show up and, with the story now thoroughly simplified, *expose* the famine, commenting on forgotten people in remote and dangerous places. News accounts will imply that neglect by the West is partly responsible for the mass starvation. Readers and viewers are supposed to be concerned, even feel guilty. Television coverage dominates, and news reports are saturated with graphic descriptions of hunger and misery along with the number of people dead or in danger.⁴⁶

Step 4 occurs as the numbers of starving and dying people grow. This is the key moment in the evolution of famine coverage. How many people have to die before the famine becomes a major media event? There doesn't ap-

pear to be a set number. But one can be sure of a turning point when words like *holocaust* or *hell* or *famine of the century* are found regularly in media accounts.⁴⁷

Step 5 is reached when more journalists arrive from smaller papers and local television stations. Now the crisis has become a cause. An international public has been mobilized; donations flow to relief organizations; newspaper articles include lists of relief agencies accepting donations; and during newscasts television networks provide the toll-free numbers of the agencies.⁴⁸

In reality, parts of Africa are always at Step 1, though often the predicted famines fail to materialize either because the people predicting the famine are wrong or because governments find other ways to circumvent food shortages. Understanding how the media reports events like famines is important for national leaders, but it is less than useful unless these same leaders understand how the American public reacts to this reporting and to decisions reached by their leaders.⁴⁹

Reaction of the Public to Foreign Policy Decisions

Given that national will can be represented by the collective public opinion of the American people and that it is important to cultivate this opinion, national leaders also must understand how Americans react to foreign policy decisions—particularly those that involve the commitment of American troops. It is also important that these leaders understand that several myths have arisen involving how Americans view such commitments. To cultivate the national will effectively, they must be able to recognize these myths and address the true American view of such commitments. Before examining these myths, however, it is useful to summarize previous studies and experiences regarding the *typical* American reaction to foreign policy decisions.

First, almost every general foreign policy survey in the past five years shows that the American public is increasingly well informed about global issues, devotes attention to evolving international events, and has opinions on most major foreign and defense policy questions. Americans do take into account moral issues in evaluating foreign policy

choices, but they are pragmatic when deciding on support for overseas initiatives, including the use of force. That is, they evaluate these choices on a case-by-case basis rather than following universal principles or ideology when addressing these decisions. Americans typically prefer short-term actions with a high probability of success over longer term involvements with uncertain prospects for achievement (but, then, most other nations probably feel this way).⁵⁰

Related to this preference for short-term actions is that Americans remain resistant to new Vietnam-like military involvements which seek to enforce nation-building or intervene in civil wars. However, they are more willing to use force for humanitarian ends or to counter blatantly aggressive behavior. Most Americans object to providing military aid overseas, but, again, humanitarian assistance clearly outranks all other international initiatives in popular support. Americans consistently support nonmilitary international involvement, although they continue to have reservations about a "blanket intervention policy."⁵¹

Americans are clear, however, about the general strategy they believe the president and the nation should pursue: the use of military force is the exception in US foreign policy. The public usually supports multilateral and cooperative operations with support and contributions from allies and other countries. The costs and risks involved in any overseas military option should be explained, and no longer can there be blanket approval for military preparation against a range of unlikely threats. Many view the loss of American life—even when in the tens and not the hundreds—as intolerable, but most also recognize there are international commitments and national interests beyond simple self-defense for which the risk of war is justifiable.⁵²

As implied above, a key factor shaping the American public's attitude toward a decision to use force is whether military action is unilateral or multilateral. While Americans are more likely to support US military involvement as part of a coalition or a United Nations-sanctioned effort, there are profound reservations about placing US troops under UN command. While a majority of Americans (64 percent) still believes the United States should cooperate fully with the UN, most Americans are reluctant to place

US troops under permanent UN command. Americans are more comfortable having US troops under the command of NATO allies or in UN missions for only limited periods.⁵³ Keeping these generalities in mind, it is appropriate to review now several myths regarding public reaction to foreign policy decisions.

Myth 1. The first myth is that the US public believes every war is different. However, US public reaction in every case is surprisingly consistent as public support rises and falls predictably. This is particularly true of limited wars fought in distant parts of the world. Of all the complex variables governing public opinion, the single overwhelming factor is casualties. For example, as the number of dead, wounded, and missing in action rose, support for both the Vietnam and Korean wars fell at an identical rate. In fact, this simple relationship explained virtually all of the change in attitudes during both wars: other factors, such as the initial public support for the war, the vagaries of domestic politics, and different levels of public dissent have little to do with changing public attitudes. In both wars, when casualties rose from 100 to 1,000, support for the war dropped 15 percentage points.⁵³ As casualties rose from 1,000 to 10,000, support declined by another 15 percentage points.⁵⁴

Myth 2. A second myth is that, for Americans, "stalemates quickly become stale." The myth is that if a conflict reaches a stalemate, Americans will tire of it and demand that troops be brought home. Little historic evidence supports this view. For example, the US has kept troops in South Korea for over 40 years with little dissent from the public.⁵⁵

Myth 3. A third myth holds that "in times of war we aren't Republicans or Democrats, we're Americans," or, put another way, "dissent ends at the water's edge." The public clearly rallies around the president in times of crisis and that rallying occurs more readily when a conflict "(1) is international and (2) involves the United States and particularly the President directly (especially when he personally informs the public, usually through the dramatically effective medium of television), and (3) is specific, dramatic, and sharply focused," especially when it involves a deci-

sive—and usually military—response at the president's direction.⁵⁶ John E. Mueller also found that the Korean and Vietnam wars both produced rally effects initially but that ultimately the rally began to subside with increases in casualties and the emergence of internal opposition.⁵⁷ Other research involving polls conducted during the Korean and Vietnam eras suggests that party membership significantly affected individual perceptions of the overall success or failure of the war effort. Members of the president's political party, in other words, tended to be more supportive than opposition party members. Therefore, among the first cracks to appear in public support for a military operation are those associated with partisan differences.⁵⁸

Myth 4. A fourth myth holds that Americans need a strong reason to believe in a war. As implied earlier, public opinion of recent wars—even those the populace doesn't completely understand and later will reject—typically starts high. This myth can probably be traced to Vietnam. In 1967 Gallup asked Americans this question: "Do you feel you have a clear idea of what the Vietnam war is all about—that is, what we are fighting for?" Fewer than half—48 percent—thought they knew. To many, this result suggested the government's failure to justify the war to its citizens. But another explanation might be that Americans typically are simply ill-informed about foreign relations, including war policy. Thus, the 48-percent figure may reflect acknowledged ignorance. Consider what happened when Gallup asked the same question six months after the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Barely half—53 percent—of those interviewed said they had a clear idea of why the United States was in World War II. (The percentage did rise considerably later in the war.)⁵⁹

Myth 5. Another generally accepted myth is that the US cannot fight a war in the television age. This myth should have died 15 years ago when studies began showing that increases in casualties had almost precisely the same effect on public attitudes toward Vietnam—America's first TV war—as they did for Korea, perhaps the last newspaper war. If television had a pronounced effect on attitudes, the rate of decline during the Vietnam War should have been

greater.⁶⁰ In Mueller's words, "War, after all, is a singularly unsubtle phenomenon, and the assumption that people will know how they feel about it only if they see it regularly pictured on their television screens is essentially naive and patronizing."⁶¹

Myth 6. Finally, another myth is that Americans don't like being the aggressors and won't tolerate an offensive war. Except in extraordinary circumstances, most Americans dutifully follow the commander in chief on such matters as foreign relations where the public has little knowledge or firmly held views. Remarkably, this tendency prevails even when Americans initially may have doubts about the direction in which they are being led. A classic example occurred in 1989. An October Gallup survey asked respondents whether they favored or opposed using "U.S. military forces to invade Panama and overthrow Noriega." Only 26 percent supported committing troops. Barely two months later, President George Bush did commit troops to Panama in Operation Just Cause. The public reaction was immediate: 89 percent of those questioned in a Gallup Poll days after the invasion supported the president's actions; just 13 percent were opposed.⁶²

Assuming that our national leaders understand these concepts, they are in a position to cultivate the national will in support of a foreign policy decision. While no checklist exists to guarantee success, there are certain guidelines to follow that will help them to at least conserve—if not to cultivate—the national will in supporting such a decision.

National Will and Use of Military Force: How to Cultivate It

The first concern for a leader who wants to cultivate the national will is to understand the basic ideas on which the United States is based. Kissinger was quoted earlier as he described the basic ideas on which this nation was founded and said "that the United States possessed the world's best system of government, and that the rest of mankind could attain peace and prosperity by abandoning traditional diplomacy and adopting America's reverence for

international law and democracy."⁶³ While national leaders must find their own words if they hope to garner support for their decisions to commit troops, they must build their words on these basic ideas.

A second, related prerequisite for marshalling the national will is to ensure the public has confidence in the government. As Morgenthau argues, "A government that is truly representative, not only in the sense of parliamentary majorities, but above all in the sense of being able to translate the inarticulate convictions and aspirations of the people into international objectives and policies, has the best chance to marshal the national energies in support of those objectives and policies."⁶⁴ This is, obviously, much easier said than done, but unless the American people perceive that the government places the nation's welfare first, public support will be difficult to generate. It is easier for a popular government to cultivate the national will than for an unpopular one to do so. For example, it was probably much easier for Ronald Reagan to cultivate the national will in early 1984 than it would have been for Richard Nixon in early 1974.

A corollary to this recommendation is that, to maximize the national will in support of a policy, the executive and legislative branches should work closely together and be mutually supportive in developing and executing that policy. This is also obviously easier said than done, but the Congress is the only organization within the government whose primary purpose is to articulate the will of the people. If the government is to present itself as being truly representative, as Morgenthau recommends, then the executive branch must consult frequently with Congress to ensure the will of the people is taken into account when policy is made. To do otherwise is to appear either arrogant or incompetent or both, neither of which builds the confidence of the people.

The national leadership also must understand how public opinion and the media work, as mentioned earlier. The leadership should avoid being swayed by the results of quiz show polling methods, especially shortly after a policy decision is made and announced. If polls are commissioned by the leadership to gauge the national will, the leadership

should demand that the pollsters report to what stage public opinion has evolved on an issue. Unfortunately, opinion polls as presently reported do not indicate this. Leaders attempting to communicate with the public without this information risk gridlock and frustration. Why? Because to communicate with the populace, a leader has to know where people stand in their thinking and where they are headed.⁶⁵ Only on issues which they have thoroughly digested, as discussed earlier, can the public be expected to register anything close to resembling a collective will. Similarly, the leadership should pay attention to the news stories involving the issues and the policies in question and determine the stage of media reporting. This method when combined with the stage of public opinion, will help the leadership to interpret better the polling reports they do receive and the media reports they review.

If the decision is reached to commit US troops, the nation's leaders should prepare the public by laying out exactly what these troops will be doing and why—with due concern for security considerations. Of great importance to both the public and the military is the unambiguous statement of clear, attainable, and measurable military objectives that will satisfy the policy objectives. Not only does this procedure permit the military to provide a force appropriate to the mission, but it also establishes the guidelines for the desired end-state that will signal the end of the military phase of the operation and the withdrawal of American forces.⁶⁶

The nation's leaders also need to communicate why the deployment of forces is essential. If they do not, the government's reactions to foreign events will appear disconnected, and individual setbacks will appear to define the whole.⁶⁷ The leadership must not wait to do this because public opinion abhors a leadership vacuum. For example, this hesitation hurt Lyndon B. Johnson in his reaction to the Tet offensive. We need to recognize that there will be an initial groundswell of support for the president ("the rally effect") but also that support will erode with time. It will erode because the opposition party and others not supportive of the president will debate the president's actions and question whether the same objective could be accom-

plished without the use of troops. In fact, that is what the opposition party should do in the American system. Support also can erode as public opinion on the issue evolves through Yankelovich's seven stages.

As the people think more about the issue, inevitably they will question its appropriateness. Naturally, they will ask when the troops will be brought home. While stating an exact date for the withdrawal of American troops is not a good idea, it is a good idea to describe exit criteria that will be used to measure success. That is, the leadership must have a desired end-state for the operation in mind prior to committing troops, and they must describe this desired end-state to the American public. If they cannot do this, then perhaps the operation should not be undertaken in the first place. Again, following General Weyand's logic, the American people deserve to know why the leadership is *borrowing* their army.

When putting out this message to the American people, keep it relatively simple, make sure everyone is telling the same story, and tell the story repeatedly. In November 1990 the *Wall Street Journal* hosted a roundtable discussion with a group of average Americans to talk about why the US had deployed troops to the Middle East. During the discussion "every one of the voters urged Mr. Bush to tell the American people much more about why hundreds of thousands of US troops [had] been sent to the Persian Gulf, and what they're supposed to do there."⁶⁸ A common theme throughout the discussion was, "Don't hold anything back, we can take it." Just about all the participants in the discussion were prepared to believe there were valid reasons for the deployment, but they were divided over whether the reasons that had been given by the leadership to that point actually explained US actions. Those who believed the overriding reason was to curb Iraqi aggression could accept that as a reason, but those who believed oil was the real reason for the operation had more difficulty.⁶⁹ This point illuminates the importance of the leadership understanding the basic ideas on which the nation is based. The closer the reason for deployment approaches these core ideas, the more likely it is that American national will will support them.

Finally, during and after the operation, the national leadership should reinforce success. For example, in Somalia when 18 Army Rangers were killed, the national leadership failed to point out that, on that same day, over 1,000 people were saved from dying from starvation (using UN figures). This does not mean exaggerating success or trying to sell the American public a bill of goods, as was the case during the months preceding the Tet offensive. It does mean accurately pointing out to the American people what has been accomplished and what remains undone. If failure occurs, national leadership will be unable to hide it, given the omnipresent news media in today's world. It has to accept responsibility and explain what happened. Again though, in either case, the leadership should not overreact to overnight polling results. As Yankelovich points out, it takes time for the public to fully digest an issue, and, even if failure occurs, it does not necessarily mean that the national will to complete the mission has evaporated. Let us examine the Somalia operation.

Case in Point: Somalia and United States National Will

The Somalia operation had its roots in UN Security Council Resolution 688, adopted on 5 April 1991. With this resolution the Security Council declared for the first time that a member government's repression of its own people—resulting in urgent humanitarian needs—constituted a threat to international peace and security. Following this guideline the Security Council attempted to arrange a cease-fire among the warring factions in Somalia but by mid-1992 had made little progress. The civil war there continued unabated, humanitarian assistance could not be delivered, thousands of Somalis died of disease and starvation, and the threat to hundreds of thousands more grew daily. Somali gangs freely attacked UN facilities, stealing trucks, food, and fuel supplies.⁷⁰

A 500-man Pakistani battalion was finally deployed in October 1992, but they were immediately pinned down at the Mogadishu airport. Other nations contemplated sending additional forces to assist with the peacekeeping, but

they hesitated since there was no peace to keep. In November the US State Department urged that a "major U.N. military force" should be sent, including US troops to distribute humanitarian assistance directly. The Department of Defense argued instead that a US-led coalition, not under UN jurisdiction, be dispatched to distribute aid. Their plan had the UN replacing US forces after "a very short time." On 25 November 1992 President Bush approved this plan, provided the UN secretary general agreed.⁷¹

The US plan presented to Boutros Boutros-Ghali involved deploying up to 30,000 troops (including those from other nations) to secure key ports, airports and roads, and aid distribution centers in central and southern Somalia. This limited mission was intended to stabilize the military situation only to the extent needed to avoid mass starvation, and the US expected to hand the operation over to the UN after three or four months. The mission was to be conducted peacefully, but harsh force would be used to prevent interference from Somali factions. The plan clearly stated that the US deployment would be under US command. There also was no consideration of disarming the various Somali factions nor any discussion of a US presence in the northern secessionist region of Somaliland nor any mention of nation-building. The Security Council approved the US proposal and adopted Resolution 794 on 3 December 1992. Authorizing US plans, the resolution sought to establish "as soon as possible the necessary conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance."⁷²

US forces entered Somalia on 9 December 1992. On that same day, however, the secretary-general told a delegation sent from Washington to brief the secretariat that he wanted the coalition not only to disarm the Somali factions but also to defuse all mines in the country, set up a civil administration, and begin training civilian police. Over the next few days the State Department reminded the UN that the US saw its mission as limited but wanted to cooperate with the secretariat to hand over the operation to the UN. When this hand-over took place, the US would consider requests for logistical support but made no promises.⁷³

By late December-early January 1993, humanitarian assistance was regularly flowing to critical areas. Mediation

efforts were progressing, with all major factions agreeing to a conference on national reconciliation to be held in mid-March. US forces already were withdrawing and being replaced by troops from other nations. By 20 January 1993 the original plan and schedule were still on track, although the Somalia problem was definitely not solved.⁷⁴

By late February, with the new Clinton administration in place, fighting among the Somali factions and with the international force led some US officials to believe an even larger American contingent was needed to remain in Somalia to assist the UN forces. On 26 March the Security Council, under US pressure, adopted Resolution 814 which called on the secretary-general's special representative "to assume responsibility for the consolidation, expansion, and maintenance of a secure environment throughout Somalia." The resolution also requested that the secretary-general seek financing for "the rehabilitation of the political institutions and economy of Somalia." This resolution essentially endorsed the concept of nation-building in Somalia; further, the resolution projected that 8,000 US logistical troops would remain along with a 1,000-member quick-reaction force. It, in effect, represented a major change from the original objectives of the operation. There was no consultation by the administration with Congress about this major change, nor was it reported heavily by the press. The actual hand over from the US-led coalition to the UN-led coalition then dragged on until 4 May 1993.⁷⁵

Shortly afterward, fighting broke out again in Mogadishu and other parts of Somalia. On 5 June forces believed to be under the command of Gen Mohamed Farah Aideed attacked UN troops. At least 23 Pakistani peacekeepers were killed, and many more were wounded. The Security Council immediately authorized the arrest of Aideed and others responsible for the attack, and US combat forces struck positions believed to be held by Aideed followers. In effect the UN had now taken sides against Aideed. Again, there was little or no consultation with Congress.⁷⁶

Military operations continued throughout the summer—sometimes directed against civilians—and US and UN casualties mounted. Aideed, however, remained at large.

More US forces were committed, including Army Ranger units. Despite these problems, the Clinton administration maintained its broad policy objectives, but "all of these events were taking place in the context of confused administration efforts . . . to articulate more fully what its larger peacekeeping policies actually were."⁷⁷

Amidst these efforts to explain the administration's objectives in Somalia, disaster struck. On 3 October 18 Rangers were killed and many more wounded in a firefight in Mogadishu. One American was taken hostage, and one of his dead comrades was dragged naked through the capital's streets, appearing in media pictures around the world. Bipartisan congressional anger erupted, and the Clinton administration tried to defend itself. However, according to the *Wall Street Journal* in a 7 October report, lawmakers who attended a congressional briefing on 5 October said Secretary Les Aspin was "confused and contradictory" and that Secretary of State Warren S. Christopher "sat virtually silent." The administration immediately decided to double the US presence in Somalia and announced its intention to withdraw entirely by 31 March 1994.⁷⁸

The conventional wisdom regarding the US decision to withdraw had it that the US "lost its will to continue in Somalia." While there was an uproar in Congress over the loss of the Rangers in Mogadishu and much criticism levied at the Clinton administration for its handling of the affair, there is no convincing argument that US national will evaporated and that this evaporation was the reason for the pullout. Rather, it was the administration's perception of the national will evaporating that precipitated withdrawal. To support this argument, the guidelines proposed in the last chapter will be reviewed to determine whether the national leadership did or did not follow them.

The first guideline involved the national leadership understanding the basic ideas on which the nation is based. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations understood this, although they had different notions on policies that best supported these basic ideas. They do not score as well with the second guideline, however, in ensuring public confidence in the government. There was little coordination with Congress, and the Clinton administration's perform-

ance when meeting with congressmen in the aftermath of the Ranger debacle was less than professional. The congressional session with Christopher and Aspin was, in fact, a disaster and contributed as much to their problems with the legislative branch as did the lack of coordination prior to the operation.

As to public opinion polls, the Clinton administration demonstrated a lack of understanding of the relationship between public opinion and national will and overreacted in the aftermath of the disaster. For example, results of an opinion poll published in the 18 October 1993 issue of *Time* ostensibly demonstrated the deep public concern over the Mogadishu incident. However, a closer look at the questions suggests that, while there was justifiable concern, a definitive judgement on the state of the national will cannot be made. For example, when asked, "Which should be an important goal of the U.S. in Somalia?" 96 percent of the respondents said it should be "making sure U.S. soldiers taken prisoner are released." While it indicates reasonable concern over the health and well-being of US troops, this question does not address the issue of the national will. In fact, 63 percent said "capturing the Somali warlord responsible for attacking U.S. troops" should be an important goal. This was the reason the Rangers went into Mogadishu in the first place. Further, 43 percent said "establishing a stable government in Somalia" should be an important goal.⁷⁹ While certainly less than one-half of the respondents, this total does not really indicate a wholesale abandonment of even the newer objectives set forth by the Clinton administration. Also, the respondents may not have really understood what was meant by *stable government* (such a lack of understanding is reasonable given the administration's apparent confusion over the term), so the 57 percent not choosing this as an important goal could have been simply registering their confusion or ignorance as to the definition of this term.

In another example, an ABC poll was conducted immediately following the fire fight. This poll showed that 52 percent of Americans did not approve of President Clinton's handling of the situation, and two out of three respondents favored withdrawal of US troops. Even at that point, how-

ever, one-half of those who favored withdrawal believed it should be carried out gradually—over six months—and with concern for a final peaceful settlement. Comparable polling results taken days and weeks later—after Clinton's speech to the nation—demonstrated support for gradual disengagement and continued international monitoring of political outcomes. While Congress reacted to the Ranger losses in Mogadishu with anger, the avalanche of demands from the public for withdrawal did not really materialize. The principal public concern seemed to rest with policy drift and confusion about the limits of American engagement.⁸⁰ The point is that public opinion polls conducted in the aftermath of Mogadishu did not gauge the national will. In fact, the public had not had time to really digest the nature of the Somalia operation, so they had not even come close to Yankelovich's seventh stage. There is no way that these polls (and others like them) could have gauged the true nature of the national will, despite the fact that many in positions of responsibility interpreted these results as *the national will*.

Similarly, there was a lack of understanding of how the media was reporting the famine in Somalia, which was one of the key sources of international pressure on the Bush administration and, therefore, one of the reasons the US got involved in the first place. Media reports, in fact, conflicted on the severity of conditions in Somalia. A careful reading of press reports would have allowed readers to notice the situation in Baidoa was improving, while the situation in Bardera was getting worse, yet the overall impression created by these reports was that the entire country was starving. Television cameras tended to seek out and broadcast the worst cases, while the print media played only a secondary role in the reporting. On 11 October 1992, before US troops went in, Reuters reported that the international relief efforts had turned the tide of death in Baidoa, a symbol of Somalia's agony. "The known daily death rate has dropped from 400 to around 100 in recent weeks, [the Red Cross] says."⁸¹

At the same time that conditions in Baidoa were improving without international military intervention, news accounts conveyed that 1,000 people were dying every day in

Somalia. Most news accounts echoed this 29 October report from the United Nations as found in the *Washington Post*: "The new UN plan comes amid growing concern that unless international relief efforts intensify, an estimated 250,000 Somalis could die by the end of the year and an additional 4.5 million could face starvation."⁸²

The intent of the UN report appears to have been to generate big numbers to provoke a response. Further, exactly what does it mean to face starvation? Nomads, for example, probably face starvation all the time. Nor did anyone in the press point out that dire predictions did not materialize. Typical of summertime newspaper stories was this Associated Press dispatch: "The United Nations estimates 1.5 million people are in imminent danger of starving to death in Somalia while another 4.5 million are nearing a food crisis."⁸³

Contributing to the problem was that few correspondents put their observations in context. Most of them were reporting from the so-called triangle of death that encompassed the towns of Bardera and Baidoa. The reporters were brought there, housed, and fed by relief agencies working in those towns. The agencies travelled on the same roads that four armies had passed as Mohamed Farah Aidid battled first with the forces of Siad Barre and later with soldiers loyal to Barre's son-in-law, Mohamed Hersi Morgan. Bardera experienced a large increase in deaths in mid-October 1992 after Aidid's forces pulled out and Morgan's fought their way in. This temporary surge in the death rate coincided with a huge increase in media attention that made all of Somalia seem like Bardera. In addition, relief camps were set up in major towns, presenting to visiting reporters a concentration of misery that was shocking to viewers.⁸⁴

However, a different perspective could have resulted from talking to aid workers who had worked in Somalia but were not providing relief at the time. "If you drove ten miles off the main road, you found people living normal lives," says Willie Huber of the Austrian agency SOS-Kinderdorf. Huber had been in Somalia since the early 1980s and is the only aid worker who did not leave Mogadishu during the civil war.⁸⁵

This discussion of media reporting underscores the Bush administration's overreaction to these media reports. Yes, conditions were bad in certain parts of Somalia, but conditions also were actually improving before any troops were sent. Had the national leadership a better understanding of the nature of these media reports, they could have better tailored their message to the American people to help in cultivating national will in support of the troop deployment.

In preparing the public by articulating as clearly as possible exactly what the troops will be doing and why, this was an obvious failure by both administrations. The Bush administration never clearly laid out for the American public why the US was going into Somalia. The Clinton administration complicated things even further by changing the goals midstream, then not articulating them clearly to the public. They even had difficulty articulating their objectives during their meeting with congressmen after Mogadishu.

Contributing to this public confusion over the US goals in Somalia was the absence of a clearly articulated desired end-state. As stated earlier, rather than identifying an exit point, a set of exit criteria should be defined as part of the overall objectives of the operation so that the disengagement of peacekeeping forces should commence once certain critical objectives have been met. In Somalia, these could have included creating local police forces; reactivating local, district, and regional councils; completing basic infrastructural repairs in the fertile region between the Juba and Shebeele rivers; and, finally, offering clear evidence that the process of national reconciliation, based on the institution of clan elders, had taken root.⁸⁶

A final point regards the failure to point out the successes that had been achieved when the Rangers died. Based on the figures the UN was advertising (if they can be believed), on the day the 18 Rangers died in Mogadishu, approximately 1,000 people were prevented from starving. Had the administration reminded the US public of this, it would have helped conserve the national will to continue the humanitarian efforts in that country. Even without that reinforcement, the American national will did not nec-

essarily evaporate when the Rangers died. There were reasonable questions asked by Congress and others and cries for withdrawal, but public opinion polls, while indicating these same concerns, did not indicate an overwhelming desire to depart Somalia. The national leadership made the decision to depart based on a *perceived* lack of American national will to continue the operation.

Conclusion

National will plays a decisive role during any application of US military power, not just the employment of forces to fight America's wars. Because of the decisive role of national will, the nation's leaders must understand what it is, not just its definition, but the ways in which this will can be articulated and how it can be cultivated. That is, the national will is not just part of the backdrop against which foreign policy decisions are made; it is an element of national power that can be cultivated or groomed to garner support for those decisions. This cultivation does not mean lying to the American people to justify irrational employment of their army; rather, it involves clearly explaining to them why the nation's leaders need to *borrow* their army and when the people can expect to get it back.

In the case of the United States it is difficult to make definitive statements about the American will. The two world wars were on foreign soil; there was no physical damage to the homeland through invasion or bombing; and civilians were not endangered. The loss of American life was small compared with that of the other combatants. Moreover, the standard of living at home was maintained at a fairly high level. Sacrifices were minimal and lasted just over a year in World War I and a bit over three and one-half years in the Second World War—compared with four years for Britain and France in World War I and six years for Britain in World War II. The Vietnam War—because it was considered a limited war in response to a limited threat—was never perceived by the public to pose much danger to American security, and life went on pretty much as usual in the United States. There is still no record on how the national morale will hold up when sacrifice is

demanding in a real crisis.⁸⁷ Because of this lack of experience, one must look at various means by which the American public expresses its collective will. In the context of foreign policy decision making, the most important means by which the American people express this will is through public opinion. Public opinion, though, infers opinion that has fully evolved through all seven stages, as defined by Yankelovich. Only this fully mature collective opinion can represent national will. The nation's leaders must understand how this evolution process works; they also need to understand how the media report events because this reporting can have an impact on how opinion evolves. Finally, they need to understand how public opinion can be cultivated. This paper presents several guidelines to aid them in this. Unfortunately, in Somalia the national leadership did not understand the nature of national will and how it can be cultivated. The lack of a clear explanation to the American people as to why the US was involved, the apparently changing objectives of the operation which were undertaken without consulting with the people's elected representatives, and the overreaction to both public opinion polls and media reporting reveal this lack of understanding. One can only hope that future leaders will have a better understanding of this vital component of national power and will avoid mistakes like those prevalent in Somalia.

Notes

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